

Summary of Key Recruitment and Retention Research

Best Practices for Hunting and Shooting R&R Project

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Following are key, selected results pulled from research literature regarding recruitment and retention of hunters.

R&R Analysis, 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

This recently released report examines recruitment and retention using data from the 1991, 1996, 2001, and soon to be released 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation.

- About 5% fewer 6 to 19 year-olds living at home had ever hunted in 2005 compared to those who had ever hunted in 1990 (from 16% to 11%).
- In 1990, 49% of all individuals who had ever hunted in their lives remained active; by 2005, this percentage fell to 43%.
- 67% of first-time hunters were 20 years of age and younger. This underscores the importance of recruitment during the adolescent years. However, it also means that about a third of first time hunters were 21 and over.
- It's a surprise to many that about a third of first time hunters were 21 and over. While adolescence is the most important time for recruitment, young adults and the middle aged also provide substantial numbers of new recruits.
- Additional research revealed that close to a quarter of first time hunters 21 and over were 21 to 29 years old; half of them were 30 to 45 years old; and about a quarter were over 45.
- Females are often initiated into hunting and fishing at older ages than males.
- Rural residents participate in hunting for the first time at a younger age than urban residents (38% of first-time hunters living in rural areas are 12 or younger, compared to 26% in urban areas). Hunters initiated at younger ages tend to have higher levels of dedication to the sport and tend to be more active later in life.
- The percent of all children living at home in the US who have ever been hunting or fishing has declined steadily from 1990 to 2000. However, the decline in both activities leveled off from 2000 to 2005.
- The West North Central [census] region [ND, SD, NE, KS, MN, IA, MO] experienced the least decrease in R&R. Do wildlife agencies in this region have practices that could be applied elsewhere (e.g., are public areas managed differently? Do they promote it better? etc.) or are other factors in play (more areas to fish and hunt, less urbanization, etc.).

- The smallest decline in initiation rates was seen among children living in suburban areas (inside metropolitan area but not in central city).
- Fishing and hunting are familial activities, with children's activities heavily influenced by parents within the household. If retention of parents can be improved, it is likely that initiation of children can also be improved.
- The cost of hunting has been an issue to those with lower incomes. It is important to note that the costs associated with hunting are not limited to equipment, licenses, fuel, etc. Costs also include those associated with spending time in leisure activities and not working.
- Participation rates of hunting age children (13-19) of both sexes are highly correlated with parent participation rates.

Waterfowl Hunter Satisfaction Think Tank

- Research suggests that regulations can have an effect on satisfaction and short-term participation when there are dramatic changes (e.g., major reduction in opportunity or increased costs). However, it is difficult to predict accurately the specific regulatory conditions affecting participation or magnitude of the effect(s).
- Moderate changes in such things as season length or bag limits have not been shown to produce significant effects on R&R.
- Regulations may introduce new constraints to low-commitment hunters and may serve as the impetus for a gradual withdrawal from the activity.
- Without better understanding of interactions, changes in regulations may not have the intended consequences in terms of hunter satisfaction, participation, or involvement in conservation.
- Long-term participation is primarily influenced by broad-based changes in an individual's social and cultural values, many of which are beyond the natural resource manager's control.
- Recent research indicates that there is a much larger pool of "active" hunters than previously suspected. In any given year, only a portion of this pool of hunters actually hunts. As a result, the composition of hunters in any given year may be very different from the previous year.
- It is likely that a large percentage of hunters who eventually desert the sport do not make a conscious decision to quit. Termination is often marked by prolonged inactivity with the intention of one day returning to the activity.

NSSF Hunting Participation Think Tank

In 1999 the National Shooting Sports Foundation assembled a Think Tank of national experts to examine the literature and develop recommendations for increasing participation in hunting and shooting sports. This work remains one of the best summaries of the issue to date. Some research-based conclusions:

- *Probably the biggest obstacle facing hunter participation today is the lack of social infrastructure and social support for hunters.* This has impacts at every stage of development. Becoming a hunter involves more than just firing a gun or going afield to harvest game. It is more attitudinally based and involves development of an individual's perception of him/herself as a hunter and as part of a hunting culture. Providing social support is very difficult.
- Development of social competence is critical for creating long-term hunters. Many agency programs (e.g., hunter education) focus on building technical competence, with little thought toward how regulations or policies may restrict development of social competence (apprentice opportunities, minimum age restrictions, passport programs, etc.).
- People typically move through the following basic stages of development as they become hunters. These stages are not always linear and people may fall away from any stage, but there also are specific strategies that can be used to effectively target people in every stage—to try to get them to proceed on to the next stage.
 - Awareness – discovery that hunting is a possibility
 - Interest – realize that hunting holds interest
 - Trial – try hunting (not necessarily in the field with a firearm)
 - Continuation – like it enough to do it again and again
 - Hunting Proponent – become an active advocate
 - Temporary Cessation – lapse for various reasons, but intend to continue
 - Desertion – give it up permanently
- All hunters have one or more motivations for hunting—primary reasons why they become involved and stay involved. These motivations have been described as:
 - *Achievement* - motivated by numbers of animals harvested, trophy animals, methodology, recognition, and demonstration of skill.
 - *Affiliative* - motivated by relationships and interactions with family & friends.
 - *Appreciative* - motivated to seek solitude and “wilderness” experiences.

People in every stage of hunting involvement may have one, two, or all three of these motivations, but in general, research suggests that people in earlier stages tend to have single motivations; often achievement-oriented. Agencies should provide opportunities for hunters to develop and satisfy multiple motivations to encourage long-term participation.

Miscellaneous Results

Population projections (US Census Bureau)

- Proportion of US population aged 55 and older will increase from 21% in 2000 to 30% in 2010.
- In 1999, 1 in 9 Americans was of Hispanic descent. By 2030, almost 1 in 5 will be Hispanic.
- In 1999, 1 in 8 Americans was of African-American descent. By 2030, this will increase to 1 in 7.
- Women make up 51% of the US population, and this is expected to remain roughly constant through 2030. [Women make up about 9% of all hunters (USFWS)]
- Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of US population lives in non-rural housing, and this percentage is expected to continue to rise.

Women Hunters (USFWS)

- There were about 1.2 million female hunters in the US in 2000. The highest concentrations were in the Midwest (35%), followed by the West (29%) and the South (22%). Female participation was the lowest in the Northeast (14%).
- Women living in rural areas are 3 times more likely to hunt than those living in urban areas.
- On average, women spend fewer days hunting, take fewer trips to hunt, and spend less money on hunting than men.
- Women's motivations for hunting (Responsive Management):
 - Meat (47%)
 - Be with friends and family (27%)
 - Sport or recreation (20%)
 - Be close to nature (7%)
- Primary constraint for women's participation in hunting is lack of leisure time, presumably because of family responsibilities (Connelly et al 1996).

Rural vs Urban Lifestyle

- Common understanding (with some research support) is that rural residents are more likely to hunt than urban residents. There also is strong evidence that those influenced by family are more likely to hunt than those without social support. However, the interactions of these variables are poorly understood. That is, a rural resident's propensity to hunt may not be based on where he lives as much as it is based on other variables, such as social support, gender, or other. Stedman and Heberlein tested some of these variables and found that rural males whose fathers did not hunt are more likely to hunt than urban males whose fathers did not hunt. But in no other cases did rural upbringing result in an increased propensity for hunting. (Stedman and Heberlein, 2001.)

- In a survey of 2,872 resident Illinois hunters, place of residence (rural vs urban) was not a good predictor of hunting effort. A person who *grew up* in a rural area is more likely to be *introduced* to hunting, but living in a rural area doesn't make him/her more likely to hunt. (Miller and Vaske 2003)

Preferences

Results from a New York duck hunter survey suggest that hunter satisfaction is based more on maximizing hunter-duck interactions than maximizing harvest. That is, hunters are satisfied with seasons that maximize interactions with ducks or with particular kinds of ducks, more than total harvest. (Enck et. al., 2006)

Replacement Ratio

There are some data that suggest that the average nationwide hunter replacement ratio is only 0.69 (for every 100 hunters lost, only 69 take their place). Investigators acknowledge this is only an indicator, but it has resulted in efforts (*Families Afield* campaign) to reduce barriers to young hunters (lower minimum age, allow trial before hunter education, etc.). (Silvertip Productions and Southwick Associates)

Non-hunting Participation

- There are many people who are critical parts of the hunting community who never take a firearm into the field. Family members (spouses, elderly, etc.) of active hunters may not buy licenses, but they are essential components of the social infrastructure that sustains hunting. (Stedman et. al., 1993)
- People are more likely to solidify initial interest in hunting if they experience particular hunting-related activities (target shooting, eating game meat, sharing stories) before they are licensed to hunt. (Decker et al. 1984).

Predictors of Decreased Participation

Increasing age was not a good predictor of decreasing hunting participation once the influences of situational and personal constraints were controlled. The *best* predictors of decreased hunting effort are the perceived personal (lack of time) and situational (no land for hunting, not enough game) constraints. (Miller and Vaske 2003)

Parting Shot

There are many factors that are contributing to the decline of hunting participation. Some are broad societal trends that waterfowl managers will have little or no control over (Urbanization, isolation from the land, competition for time, transient nature of society, health issues, family/work commitments, etc.).

Other factors are related to the supply of hunting opportunity and/or hunter capability/willingness, which waterfowl managers and their partners may indeed be able to affect (loss/lack of social support, lack of access to land, huntable populations of waterfowl, timing of seasons, quality of hunt, cost, etc.).

It is likely that most hunters and anglers who eventually desert the sport do not make a conscious decision to quit. Termination is often marked by *prolonged inactivity with the intention of one day returning to the sport*. The single-most powerful predictor of continued involvement in outdoor activity is consistent, year-to-year participation. In nearly every state studied, *less than half of the license buyers participate every year*.

Agencies and organizations should capitalize on the fact that there likely are 2 to 3 more times the number of hunters in the population than actually buy permits in any single year (churn). These individuals fall into one of two groups:

1. A group poised to purchase permits (perhaps with some prompting), or
2. A group poised to skip yet one more year of outdoor involvement, and move closer to eventual desertion of the activity, with the only lingering evidence of their support for conservation being (one can hope) their voting behavior.

Moving as many people as possible from group 2 into group 1 should be a prime short-term objective of the waterfowl hunting community. This effort alone will not reverse the long-term decline in waterfowl hunters. But it could reverse the short-term decline in permit buyers, providing more funds and active potential mentors to help address the long-term issues over which the community has influence.